

MISA Communiqué (MISA AGM & Conference statement)

August 31, 2005

Media ethics and professionalism scrutinised at MISA Conference and Annual General Meeting

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Those governments in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region that still own, control and influence media operations were urged to stop furthering their political agendas through media control. Government control stifles editorial independence and free, fair and objective reporting. This was said at the recently concluded regional conference organised in Windhoek by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) on the theme Media, Ethics and Professionalism: Towards an Ethical Africa Media.

The conference noted that government ownership of the media compromise editorial independence of that media, hamper diversification of opinions and views on critical and topical issues that affect the livelihoods of citizens of our region.

The conference took a strong stand against deteriorating ethical standards in the region and stressed the need for regional ethical guidelines to shape the quality of reporting in our region. Plagiarism was condemned and journalists were urged to respect intellectual property rights.

The conference made some vital recommendations, among others the commissioning of a study in media ownership in Southern Africa. Media bodies are to take a critical look at issues of media sustainability and how funding of media could be realised in order to promote and maintain their independence and viability. The conference was encouraged to take a closer look at African media ownership models that work.

In addition, the conference resolved that no limitations on registration should be placed on media practitioners. It was agreed that the right to freedom of expression through a media practitioner should not be limited in any way by registration process by the state or any other body. Regional media bodies were called upon to actively participate in the development of principles and guidelines on ethics. MISA was mandated to work in conjunction with other regional bodies to promote the establishment of voluntary media councils in the region.

Conference delegates also debated at length the impact of HIV and AIDS on the media and applauded initiatives taken by media stakeholders to respond to the pandemic. A media action plan (MAP) was launched that set out strategies and action to be taken in dealing with HIV and AIDS and Gender within the media. MISA is one of the key drivers of the plan which was done in consultation with media stakeholders in the region, among them the Southern Africa Editors Forum (SAEF), Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network and UNAIDS.

The conference that was held from August 21-24, 2005, brought to Windhoek delegates from eleven SADC countries.

MISA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) that continued on August 25 and 26, 2005 endorsed the conference decisions. In addition the AGM strongly urged the MISA Regional Secretariat to speed up the reorganisation process of its chapter in Angola. The MISA Regional Secretariat was mandated to continue carrying out activities that would enhance and advance freedom of expression and media freedom in Angola.

The AGM ended with a gala dinner on Friday evening where the Annual MISA Press Freedom Award winner was announced. The winner, Raymond Louw, is a veteran journalist and media

freedom activist from South Africa.

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